

SOME THOUGHTS ABOUT BLACKSPOT

by Albert Ford

(adapted from the November – December 1999 MRS Newsletter)

A number of rose growers have expressed the opinion that the prevalence of blackspot in their gardens during the past year was greater than they had experienced in some years and wondered what the reason might be. There are probably a multiplicity of reasons depending on the specific garden, and I thought it might be of value to readers of this newsletter to comment on the practices which might be helpful in the coming year to control this omnipresent rose disease.

In my experience, other than the Rugosas, *R. rugosa* and hybrids of that class of roses, there are few roses which can be termed completely resistant. Among the hybrid teas, floribunda and miniatures, the most prevalent classes of roses in our gardens today, there aren't any varieties, in my judgement, that are completely blackspot resistant. They are all vulnerable, some more so than others. I used to tout **Sun Flare**, for example, as a blackspot resistant floribunda; however, it too is susceptible at times. The best we can hope for is to keep blackspot under control and, therefore, at an acceptable level in our gardens.

There are a number of things we can do to minimize the amount of blackspot present. Cleanliness is certainly important. When we recall that the spores that cause blackspot, in most instances, get on rose leaves from splashing water from the soil surface, it suggests that we keep the soil surface clean of diseased leaves that have fallen from the bush. This should be done regularly. Care should be exercised also in watering to minimize splashing of water on lower leaves. This splashing explains why blackspot normally begins on lower leaves and also why climbers seem to be less susceptible than bush roses. This concept gives meaning, too, to spraying after rain has occurred.

Maintaining good air flow around your roses is also important. To accomplish this, refrain from planting roses too close together and remove twiggy growth and foliage near the crown. This foliage is the first to be affected by spores from the ground, particularly if it remains damp. Blackspot spores germinate on new or old leaves in 9 to 18 hours on moist leaves when the temperature is in the 70 to 80 degree range. Normally, leaves must be wet for at least 7 hours for germination of spores to occur; this is the rationale behind watering in the early part of the day, if overhead watering is practiced, thus allowing time for the foliage to dry. Evening watering by methods which wet the foliage should be avoided. An additional point to keep in mind also is that good drainage facilitates the leaf-drying process.

Fall pruning in this area is generally recommended for hybrid teas and some floribundas. It should occur normally after Thanksgiving and should consist of removing top growth to about three to four feet from the crown, to prevent the rose canes from whipping around in the wind and loosening the soil around the crown exposing it to the cold winter winds and temperatures. At the same time, remove all diseased foliage from the plant and soil. This waste should be disposed of and not placed on your compost pile. If blackspot was a particular problem for you during the year, you might consider the lime-sulfur treatment of your plants during their period of dormancy. You will find the product at garden centers and it should be applied in accordance with the directions on the container.

Although the suggestions given above will help you get a more firm handle on the blackspot problem, the most important thing you can do next year is to adopt a regular

preventative spraying program. There are many fungicides which can be used. The following are some of those recommended by Howard Walters, The Rambling Rosarian:

Fungicide	Quantity	Apply Frequency	Toxicity Category*
Funginex (6.5%)	1 TBSP	weekly	Danger
Triforine EC	1 TSP	weekly	Danger
Immunox	2 TBSP	weekly	Warning
Fungi-Gard	2 TBSP	weekly	Warning
Banner-Maxx	1/3 TSP	2-3 weeks	Warning
Daconil 2787	1 TBSP	weekly	Caution

* Apply in accordance with label directions. Proper clothing, eye protection and respirator are essential.

Spraying is recommended in calm air flow and in the cool of the morning or evening to prevent leaf-burn. Apply spray on the upper and lower (undersides) of leaf surfaces. Your spray program should begin in early spring, when foliage first appears, and should continue throughout the year until frost appears.

Most consulting rosarians also recommend that the kind of spray used be varied periodically on the theory that blackspot spores can accommodate to a given product. I am not aware of experimental evidence on this point, but tend to believe it to be true. If the product you have been using somehow seems less effective than it was in the past, change to another product or alternate with a second product part of the time, say every second or third spraying. -Editor

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